Cleveland, Ohio, Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Cathedral, East Superior Avenue and East Ninth Streets, is one of the oldest Catholic parishes in the city. In early 1835, the Reverend John Dillon became the first resident priest in the village, tending to five families. By his death on October 16, 1836, two years after his ordination, he had begun a fund for erection of a permanent church. During the period of 1835-1837, the Reverend Stephen Badin, protopriest of the United States and missionary from Kentucky, made several visits to Cleveland. The Reverend Patrick O’Dwyer became the second resident pastor, arriving in September of 1837. A grant of two lots at Columbus and Girard Streets was given for the purpose of building a church to be named Our Lady of the Lake. Father O’Dwyer left for Canada in June of 1839, before the church was completed. The building was dedicated on June 7, 1840. The church became known as Saint Mary’s on the Flats. In 1852, Henry Erben of New York City installed a pipe organ in this church.

In October of 1840, the Reverend Peter McLaughlin arrived to become third pastor. The present property of the Cathedral was purchased for $4,000 in June of 1845, then on the eastern edge of the city. (East Ninth Street was then known as Erie Street.) At the request of the bishop of Cincinnati, a new diocese was created in northern Ohio on April 23, 1847, with the see erected at Cleveland. The Reverend Louis Amadeus Rappe was named the first bishop. Father Rappe had established the parish of Saint Francis de Sales in Toledo, which would become the first cathedral of the Diocese of Toledo in the next century. At this time, there were an estimated four thousand Catholics in Cleveland served by one parish.

On October 23, 1848, the cornerstone of the new cathedral was laid. Five adjoining lots were purchased at the same time. As the cathedral would not be completed for several years, Saint Mary’s on the Flats served as the pro-Cathedral, and a temporary frame chapel, known as the Chapel of the Nativity, was hastily completed for use on the new cathedral property. Upon the completion of Saint John Cathedral, Saint Mary’s on the Flats ceased to exist as a parish, though its building would be used for some time as a temporary home for several new parishes before it was eventually demolished. (1853, Saint Peter, German; 1854, Saint Mary of the Assumption, German; 1865 Saint Malachi, Irish; 1867, Saint Wenceslaus, Bohemian; 1870 Annunciation, French; 1872 Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr, Polish; abandoned by 1879; last Mass celebrated January 6, 1886; demolished September 1888.)

Plans for the exterior of Saint John Cathedral were drawn principally by Bishop Rappe and the chief contractor, John B. Wigman. Design of the interior and finishing details of the exterior were entrusted to Patrick Charles Keely of Brooklyn, New York. Saint John was the first of many Catholic cathedrals to be designed by Keely. The foundations were completed in 1848, and the superstructure commenced the following year. The walls were completed to twenty-five foot height by September, but the roof was not in place until the summer of 1850. The bishop spent much of 1849 in France, seeking financial assistance for construction, and returned rather disappointed with the results of his efforts. Further trips by the bishop in search of financial aid were also made throughout Ohio and as far away as New York. This was a commonplace occurrence for bishops and cathedrals as the country settled westward, as one of the first such expeditions was carried out by Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget of the Diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky, decades earlier.
The brick Cathedral in the Ornamental Gothic style measured 170 feet long by 75 feet wide and seated nine-hundred persons. Carved oak altars and statuary were executed in France. The building was consecrated on Sunday, November 7, 1852, by Archbishop John Purcell of Cincinnati. Bishop Rappe was the celebrant of the Mass, and Bishop John Martin Spalding of Louisville, Kentucky, preached. The Chapel of the Nativity was moved to East Superior Avenue and East Forty-First Street, where it served as Immaculate Conception Church until that parish built its present house of worship in 1873. A few years later, an episcopal residence was completed on adjacent property, replacing one at East Sixth Street and Bond Court.

A choir sang Mozart’s “Twelfth Mass” at the building’s consecration, apparently accompanied by a band. John T. Wamelink, a native of Amsterdam, Holland, served as organist of Saint Mary’s-in-the-Flats from the age of fourteen, and of the Cathedral from its consecration, until his death in 1900. Another organist of long service was Miss Beezie Giblin, who died on January 11, 1942, at the age of 94, having served for seventy years as organist to the Cathedral and other Catholic parishes of the city.

A pipe organ would not be installed in the rear gallery of the nave until 1853. The following item appeared in The Musical World and Times, as quoted in The Keraulophon in 1973:

The large Cathedral Organ, with thirty-two stops, three sets of keys, and two octaves of pedals, built for the Cathedral at Cleveland, Ohio, will be performed upon by Mr. W. A. King, Organist of Grace Church, and other professional gentlemen of this city, at the Manufactory, No. 172 Centre Street, on Saturday evening, 5th inst., commencing at 8 o’clock, for which tickets may be had at the office of the subscriber. HENRY ERBEN
New York, Feb. 1, 1853.

According to The Cleveland Herald, the organ was installed in the Cathedral by William Berry, Ebene’s foreman. An article in the journal found by Michael Friesen included the following helpful description of the instrument:
The Cathedral Organ built by Henry Erben of New York, in a handsome gothic case of grained black walnut, is 36 feet in height, 20 feet in width, 10 feet deep in the church and as much more in the tower.
It has 3 sets of keys, besides 2 octaves of pedals for the feet, and contains 30 stops, vix:

GREAT ORGAN.
Open Diapason . . . 8 feet
Stop’d Diapason . 8 "
Gamba . . . . . . . . 8 "
Principal . . . . . . 4 "
Twelfth . . . . . . . 3 "
Fifteenth . . . . . 2 "
Sexquialtera [sic] . . . . . 3 ranks
Trumpet . . . . . . . . 8 feet

SWELL ORGAN.
Open Diapason . . . 8 "
Stop’d Diapason . 8 "
Keraulophin [sic] . . . . . 8 "
Bourdon . . . . . . . . . 16 "
Principal . . . . . 4 "
Pyramid Flute . . . 4 "
The Erben organ was apparently the largest in the city at that time and was the benchmark against which all other organs were measured in Cleveland. It was also a frequent recital venue, such as on Thursday and Friday, July 21 and 22, 1870, when George W. Morgan, then organist of Grace Church, New York City, presented recitals.

Further ornamentation of the Cathedral interior continued over several years. The façade of the building was remodeled in 1878 with additional sandstone carvings. A central tower rising 240 feet was added in 1879. The interior was renovated and painted again in 1884. An episcopal throne, black walnut railing, and sanctuary furnishings were added. A vestibule added at entrance. Stained glass windows were installed above three altars. A boys school was erected in 1857 and a girls school in 1867. A new school building, later the chancery, was begun in 1888 at a cost of $55,000.

The Right Reverend Ignatius Frederick Horstmann became third bishop in 1892. In 1902, for the semi-centennial of the Cathedral, another renovation occurred, including installation of stained-glass windows from Munich. A bronze statue of Bishop Rappe was unveiled at the corner of the Cathedral property (since moved elsewhere on Cathedral property). About this time, Bishop Horstmann formed plans to build a new cathedral on property purchased at Euclid Avenue and East Seventy-Ninth Street, land that would eventually be used for Saint Agnes parish. This nationally-recognized gem of Romanesque architecture, designed by John Theodore Comes of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, finished in 1916, and containing a three-manual Tellers-Kent organ, was demolished in 1975 and 1976 in anticipation of construction for a freeway that never came to fruition. The rectory and bell tower remain standing.
Stephen Pinel’s research has uncovered the following statement about the Erben organ’s continuing endearment in a book by George Houck in 1903, that “the grand organ, after almost half a century of service, has a fullness and depth of tone surpassed by few, if any, in Cleveland.” An advertisement in The Catholic Universe in 1904 for the Votteler & Hettche firm, “Builders of Church Organs,” and then located at the corner of Jennings Avenue and Abbey Street, Cleveland, notes: “This firm has furnished instruments to a large number of Catholic churches since their establishment. Notably among those in this district being St. John’s Cathedral. . . .” No further information on this instrument is known. Perhaps the Erben organ was then showing its age, and Votteler & Hettche (or perhaps this was early enough to have been Votteler) may have overhauled the organ, perhaps for the Cathedral’s semi-centennial renovation. Another possibility is that the builder provided as second, small instrument. Unfortunately, few records of this Cleveland builder survive from this period.

In 1905, the Cathedral choir became exclusively male in membership. Around 1910, Father Francis Clovis became Diocesan Director of Music, a position that would bring him into constant contact with music at the Cathedral. The Reverend Joseph N. Trainor became Cathedral Music Director in 1921. Other organists included the Reverend Peter Schaeffers.

During the bishopric of John Patrick Farrelly, fourth bishop of Cleveland, the Diocese of Toledo would be carved from the Diocese of Cleveland in 1910. (In early 1943, the Diocese of Youngstown was created, reducing the Diocese of Cleveland to its present size of eight counties.) Bishop Farrelly also considered erecting a new cathedral in the more fashionable eastern side of Cleveland. A residence was purchased for his use in Cleveland Heights. Relocation of was considered for the University Circle area, approximately the location of Severance Hall, or Cleveland Heights. Plans for an imposing Romanesque structure were drawn. Bishop Joseph Schrembs, first bishop of Toledo, became the fifth bishop of Cleveland (later named Archbishop ad personam). He, too, considered moving the cathedral, going so far as to put the East Ninth Street property up for sale, but permanently shelved these plans in the late 1920’s. During a trip to Rome in 1925, the Bishop acquired relics of Saint Christine, which he brought back to Cleveland, causing a fitting shrine to be built in the Cathedral crypt. A renovation of the interior of Saint John occurred in 1927, and the great steeple was declared unsafe and removed the following year. A shorter steeple rising 145 feet took its place. In 1935, the sanctuary was enlarged, a new pulpit installed, and new entrances added to the building, in preparation for the Seventh National Eucharistic Congress, held throughout Cleveland in September of that year.

In 1939, the Cathedral purchased a three-manual Wicks organ, opus 2022. At that time, Burn Moore became organist.

On October 1, 1942, Matthew A. Lucas became organist and choir director of the Cathedral, a position he would hold for fifty years. Lucas would develop both a men’s and a women’s choir—the men’s choir to sing at High Mass, the women’s at Low Mass. The Sixth Bishop of Cleveland, Edward F. Hoban (later Archbishop ad personam), arrived in 1945, and quickly began to plan for a thorough renewal of the cathedral complex. The cathedral school was given over to the Sister’s College, which would become Saint John College with the opening of a new building in the mid 1940’s. The College closed in 1975. On May 6, 1946, the final Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral, as construction began for yet another complete renovation of the Cathedral. All the buildings of the complex would be faced
with Tennessee Crab Orchard limestone. Saint Agnes Church on Euclid Avenue was used as a temporary Cathedral, while smaller services were held in the chapel of old school building. The roof and rear wall of the Cathedral were removed, and the remaining walls became a shell around which the new building was constructed. The length of the building was increased to 208 feet. A 185-foot tower was added along the south side at the corner of the crossing of the nave and the transept. Two side chapels were created, separated from the sanctuary by hand-carved screens of wood, set with statues of saints. A new ten-foot wide altar of Botticino marble and a hand-carved reredos of Appalachian oak rising twenty-seven feet were featured in the new sanctuary. The Cathedral, now of French Gothic style, was consecrated on September 6, 1948. Seating was increased to 1,400 persons. The architect was George W. Stickle of Stickle, Kelly, and Stickle of Cleveland; decorating was by Rambush Decorating of New York. The Wicks organ was overhauled and installed in the Sisters’ College. Two new organs were built for the Cathedral by Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling. Job number 1630 was a three-manual organ for the rear gallery of the nave, with the Great division mounted centrally in the open on the gallery rail. The Swell is enclosed and mounted in the southwest corner, the Choir in the northwest corner. The Pedal division is in several sections, in the Great façade towers, the Swell and Choir façades, over the gallery stairwells, and under the Choir division. Job number 1631 was a two-manual chancel organ installed in a high arch behind the main altar. The two organs cost $45,000. Duplicate stop-tongue consoles were provided, each controlling both organs fully.

Original specification of 1948 Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling job number 1630:

**Great (Manual II, 3-1/2” wind pressure)**
- 16 Quintadena (61 pipes)
- 8 Principal (61 pipes)
- 8 Copula (61 pipes)
- 8 Salicional (61 pipes)
- 4 Grossoctav (61 pipes)
- 4 Octave (61 pipes)
- 4 Spitzflöte (61 pipes)
- 2-2/3 Quinte (61 pipes)
- 2 Superoctave (61 pipes)
- IV Mixture (19-22-26-29, 244 pipes)

**Swell to Great 16**
**Swell to Great**
**Swell to Great 4**
**Choir to Great**
**Choir to Great 4**

**Swell (Manual III, enclosed, 4” wind pressure for flues, 6” for strings and reeds)**
- 8 Geigen Principal (61 pipes)
- 8 Gedeckt (61 pipes)
- 8 Flauto Amabile (61 pipes)
- 8 Viola (61 pipes)
- 8 Voix Celeste (from tenor C, 49 pipes)
- 8 Aeoline (61 pipes)
8 Dulcet (from tenor C, 49 pipes)
4 Octave Geigen (61 pipes)
4 Flute (61 pipes)
2 Blockflöte (61 pipes)
V Plein Jeu (12-15-19-22-26, 305 pipes)
16 Contrafagotto (61 pipes)
8 Trompette (61 pipes)
4 Oboe Clarion (61 pipes)
8 Vox Humana (61 pipes)

Tremolo
Swell to Swell 16

Choir (Manual I, enclosed, 4” wind pressure)
16 Lieblich Gedeckt (61 pipes)
8 Gemshorn Principal (61 pipes)
8 Hohlflöte (61 pipes)
8 Dulciana (61 pipes)
4 Fugara (61 pipes)
4 Rohrflöte (61 pipes)
4 Ludwigtome (61 pipes)
2-2/3 Nazard (61 pipes)
2 Doublette (61 pipes)
1-3/5 Tierce (61 pipes)
8 Clarinet (61 pipes)

Choir to Choir 4
Swell to Choir

Pedal
16 Contrabass (32 pipes)
16 Principal (32 pipes)
16 Subbass (32 pipes)
16 Quintadena (from Great, 16’ Quintadena)
16 Lieblich Gedeckt (from Choir, 16’ Lieblich Gedeckt)
8 Octave (32 pipes)
8 Violoncello (32 pipes)
8 Flauto Dolce (44 pipes)
4 Choralbass (32 pipes)
4 Flute (extension, 8’ Flauto Dolce)

III Mixture (12-19-22 (16’), 96 pipes)
16 Posaune (56 pipes)
16 Contrafagotto (from Swell, 16’ Contrafagotto)
8 Trumpet (extension, 16’ Posaune)
4 Clarion (extension, 16’ Posaune)

Great to Pedal
Great to Pedal 4
Swell to Pedal
Swell to Pedal 4  
Choir to Pedal  

*Original specification of 1948 Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling job number 1631:*  

**Great (Manual II)**  
16 Quintaton (61 pipes)  
8 Principal (61 pipes)  
8 Copula (61 pipes)  
4 Octave (61 pipes)  
4 Spitzflöte (61 pipes)  
Swell to Great 16  
Swell to Great  
Swell to Great 4  
Great to Great 4  
Chancel On  
Chancel Swells Off  

**Swell (Manual III, enclosed)**  
8 Bourdon (61 pipes)  
8 Viola (61 pipes)  
8 Aeoline (61 pipes)  
4 Rohrflöte (61 pipes)  
III Cornet (12-15-17, 183 pipes)  
8 Oboe Clarion  
Tremolo  
Swell to Swell 16  

**Pedal**  
16 Subbass (32 pipes)  
16 Quintaton (from Great, 16’ Quintaton)  
8 Flauto Dolce (32 pipes)  
4 Choralbass (32 pipes)  
8 Fagotto (32 pipes)  
Great to Pedal  
Great to Pedal 4  
Swell to Pedal  

**Accessories**  
4 Gallery General pistons (thumb and toe)  
4 Great pistons (thumb)  
5 Swell pistons (thumb)  
4 Choir pistons (thumb)  
4 Gallery Pedal pistons (toe)  
4 Chancel General pistons (thumb, blind, with indicator lights)  
Gallery General Cancel (thumb)
Concealing the sanctuary organ is a hand-carved screen of white oak, forty-one feet high, twenty-feet wide. John Winterich & Sons crafted the work at a cost of $40,000. A dedicatory recital was presented by Mr. Lucas on Tuesday afternoon, September 7, 1948, part of the week-long celebration of the consecration of the Cathedral.

In 1977, Bishop James A. Hickey, Eighth Bishop of Cleveland, ordered the Cathedral closed and renovated according to the norms of the Second Vatican Council. The Cathedral was rededicated in its present configuration on November on November 18, 1977. For this occasion, a Missa memorialis entitled “The Promise Land” was commissioned by Dr. Alexander Peloquin, who conducted its premiere.

Karel Paukert provided a re-dedicatory recital for the Cathedral organs on Sunday evening, November 25, 1979. The organ had been cleaned, reservoirs re-leathered, swell motors reconstructed, pitmans replaced, pedalboards rebuilt, and a new combination action installed. At some point, Chimes were installed (20 tubes, from tenor A), controlled by toe stud.

In 1991, the pedalboards of both consoles were replaced, a solid-state switching system was installed, rectifiers were replaced, and new stop action magnets were installed. Addition of eighteen ranks were contemplated for the chancel organ, but not carried out. This would have added: Great, 8’ Gemshorn, 2’ Super Octave, IV Mixture, 8’ Trumpet (non-coupling, available also on Swell and Pedal); Swell, 4’ Gemshorn, 2’ Doublette, III Scharf, 16’ Cromorne, 8’ Schalmey; Pedal, 16’ Principal/8’ Octave unit, 4’ Flautino extension of 8’ Flauto Dolce, III Mixture, 16’ Fagott extension of 8’ Fagott, and 16’ Cromorne borrow from the Swell.

Throughout the 1990’s, the organ was re-leathered in stages.

In 1998, a more expansive solid-state combination action and switching system was installed, with added console accessories, and the gallery console was made moveable. New music racks were installed for the consoles, and stop tablets were added for Chancel Swell to Choir and Chancel Swell Unison Off couplers, as well as Chimes. In 1999 and 2000, more re-leathering was carried out and the swell shade motors were rebuilt.

Gregory Heislman, named Associate Organist of the Cathedral in 1981, became Director of Music in 1992 upon the retirement of Mr. Lucas. He remains in this position today, directing a comprehensive music program for the Cathedral and the community at large.

Sources:
Cleveland Architecture: 1876-1976, Eric Johannesen, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, pages 128-130

“Cleveland Organist Dies at Age of 94,” *The Diapason*, February 1, 1942, page 25

Erben, Henry, unpublished research by Stephen Pinel, East Windsor, New Jersey


Holtkamp, unpublished research by Roy F. Kehl, Evanston, Illinois

Holtkamp Organ Company records, Cleveland, Ohio, courtesy of F. Christian Holtkamp

“Holtkamp to Build Cathedral Organs,” *The Diapason*, September 1, 1946, Thirty-seventh Year, Number 10, whole number 442, page 1


“The Organ at St. John Cathedral,” *The Cleveland Herald*, March 17, 1853, issue 65, column A

“Organ Concerts,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, July 19, 1870, issue 171, column C


“There will be an exhibition. . .,” *The Cleveland Herald*, March 16, 1853, issue 64, column B

“Votteler & Hettche,” advertisement in *The Catholic Universe*, Friday, July 22, 1904, volume 30, number 1555, page 22

Mailing address:
Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Cathedral
1007 East Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Photographs of old Cathedral (not the organ) are available in 1978 cathedral history book. Good drawing of Cathedral exterior on frontispiece of *The Church in Northern Ohio.*